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Senator Church Asks Carter Pledge on Troops in Cuba

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 11 — Senator Frank Church, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, formally proposed today that the strategic arms treaty with the Soviet Union not be ratified until the President gives an assurance that Soviet troops in Cuba "are not engaged in a combat role" and will not become a threat to any nation in the Western Hemisphere.

The language of the Idaho Democrat's proposed "understanding" was less rigid than some proponents of the treaty had feared, in that it would not require that what has been reported as a Soviet combat brigade be withdrawn from Cuba.

Some officials indicated that the White House might find the proposal acceptable. Others said the Administration wanted to soften the language further.

The proposed wording, if adopted, may pose difficulties for President Carter and prevent the treaty from coming into force. The resolution could be read to require certification by the President that the Soviet troops' reputed combat-ready status had been changed. This might be embarrassing to the Soviet Union, which has denied that the troops had such a status in the first place.

Church Endorses Arms Treaty

Senator Church said in a speech on the Senate floor that without this condition the pact could not garner the two-thirds

vote needed for ratification. He endorsed the treaty by saying that it "serves the national interests of the United States" and that its rejection "would be a grave disservice to the country."

He said he was proposing his condition to save the treaty, which could be rejected if one-third of the Senate votes not to consent to it. Speaking with reporters, Senator Church denied that he was motivated by the fact that polls indicated he faces a difficult re-election campaign.

In another development, Donald H. Rumsfeld, a Secretary of Defense in the Ford Administration, told the Armed Services Committee that the Senate should not ratify the treaty. Mr. Rumsfeld, now a pharmaceuticals executive, thus joined a series of Republicans who advocated rejection, delay or substantial alteration of the treaty.

The understanding offered by Senator Church would be attached to the resolution of ratification on which the Senate would vote. Such understandings bind the United States Government but do not change the legal terms of the treaty or require Soviet assent.

Differences Over Interpretation

The Senator's understanding provides that, before the President can exchange instruments of ratification with the Soviet Union, he "shall affirm that the United States will assure" that Soviet forces in Cuba are not engaged in a combat role and will not become a threat.

The resolution was co-sponsored by three Democrats — Lawton Chiles of Florida, Walter D. Huddleston of Kentucky and Jim Sasser of Tennessee. At the suggestion of Senator Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, the majority leader, the resolution was allowed to lie on the table until tomorrow so that others may join the co-sponsors.

Some liberal Senators in both parties said they did not believe that the condition proposed by Senator Church was necessary, but they indicated they might go along with it to accommodate the feelings of senators who attach importance to the Soviet troop issue.

However, there may be disagreement over the precise meaning of the Church proposal. A liberal senator said the President probably would have to affirm only that the troops were not "actively" engaging in combat functions. However, Senator Church indicated later that he wanted Mr. Carter to give not simply his own opinion but also the assessment of the United States intelligence agencies.

In any case, the full Senate will probably have an opportunity to consider alterations in the language of the understanding when the treaty reaches the floor for debate.

The Foreign Relations Committee agreed today to begin processing the treaty and the resolution of ratification Monday. This could mean that the treaty would be ready to go to the floor by the end of the month.

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